



ANIMERICA INTERVIEW

JANET WALDO

INTERVIEW BY PATRICK MACIAS



Janet Waldo. You might not know the name, but if you've ever spent more than a few hours of your life watching cartoons, you have almost certainly heard her voice. Talking to Janet Waldo is like conversing with a whole host of beloved animated characters, including Judy Jetson (from *The Jetsons*, naturally), Penelope Pitstop from *Wacky Races*, and Josie from *Josie and the Pussycats*. Her own voice is sunny, lilting, and musical to the ear—the perfect compliment to any animated outing. The recent re-release of *Battle of the Planets* on home video (courtesy of Rhino) gives us another chance to admire Waldo's many talents. She played Princess during the show's 85-episode run. Her interview paints a fascinating picture of what happened when an American voice-acting legend crossed paths with a Japanese animated classic.

ANIMERICA: So what was going in your life just prior to *Battle of the Planets* (BOTP)?

WALDO: The interesting thing was that I was between agents. Let's see. It was 1978. I had already done *The Jetsons* and was doing a number of cartoons for Hanna-Barbera.

ANIMERICA: Can you name some titles off the top of your head?

WALDO: The first role I did for them was Judy Jetson. After I got Judy, then I was Penelope Pitstop on *Wacky Races* and *The Perils of Penelope Pitstop*. Also I was Josie from *Josie and the Pussycats* and a little old lady by the name of Granny Sweet who was on *Precious Pup*. And then of course I got the part of the mother-in-law on *The Flintstones*. I did a whole lot of cartoons, and I did many of them before BOTP.

ANIMERICA: So, as the original Josie, do you have any thoughts on the *Josie and the Pussycats* movie?

WALDO: Actually, I always like to be positive, but I wasn't crazy about that movie, the reason being that it didn't have anything to do with *Josie and the Pussycats*! People identified with the original and loved it and the movie was something from way off base, at least for me. I truly didn't think it was a very good film and I guess I wasn't alone in my opinion. But I truly loved doing *Josie and the Pussycats*.

ANIMERICA: I'm guessing around that time you were in the company of some other famous voice-actors, people like Daws Butler...

WALDO: The first people I met working in cartoons were the all-time greats. Daws Butler was on *The Jetsons* playing Elroy and something like five other regular characters. Don Messick played Astro and he later did Scooby-Doo and I always kidded him about that by saying that he stole from himself! And then of course there was Mel Blanc. This is how I became inspired to do character acting, because I saw all these people doing multiple voices. There would be these little mild-mannered men like Daws and Don Messick who would just come forth with these great villains and magnificent voices.

ANIMERICA: I'm guessing you entered the industry during the mid-'60s. What was the scene like a little more than a decade later, around the time of BOTP?

WALDO: That's a good question and I haven't stopped to think about it. It seems to me that I was between agents, and the reason I remember

that is that we all signed wonderful contracts. And Alan Dinehart, who was the director, said "these are great contracts." I was just going from one agent to another and I was in-between and Alan said, "don't sign with an agent, we'll pay you the commission." So naturally, I went ahead with that! I was working a lot. It was a good time for me and cartoons. I was doing a lot of shows at Hanna-Barbera and I think I may also have been doing *Jack and the Beanstalk* with Gene Kelly on TV and I did a show with (actor and formidable voice talent) Richard Crenna. I was working all the time and it was a very happy time in my life.

ANIMERICA: So how exactly did you get involved with BOTP?

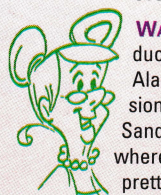
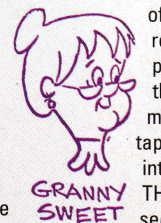
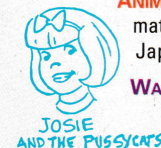
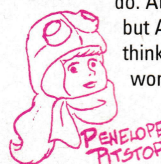
WALDO: Through Alan Dinehart. He was directing it and Jameson Brewer was writing it and, at the time, they had this series they really wanted to do. At first, we didn't have any idea how many episodes they were going to do but Alan asked me if I would audition. He auditioned a number of people and I think it was just luck that I got the part because I'm sure he auditioned some wonderful people. But then he called me one day and said "you're playing Princess." I didn't realize that while I was playing Princess that I would also be playing all the other female characters on the show as well! Except maybe for a couple. One was Alan Young's daughter Wendy. One woman actually was Japanese, Takayo Fisher. And she must have done two or three voices. Aside from her and Wendy, I got to do all the others.

ANIMERICA: So as someone who came from the Hanna-Barbera school of animation and cartoons, what were your first impressions of the original Japanese version, *Gatchaman*?

WALDO: I think we saw maybe just one whole episode of the original Japanese program. We didn't see much else of it. We were all kind of shaken by the violence, [LAUGHS] you know, they were pretty violent! But Jameson really calmed it down and made it more innocent. I loved the animation. I thought the Japanese animation was superb and it still is one of my favorite forms of animation. I like it much more than most of the current animated shows today, which just seem like someone is drawing stick people or something. I loved that beautiful artistic animation. What I loved the most about BOTP though was the music. Hoyt Curtin did the most magnificent job with that music. Just for fun the other day, I watched a tape of BOTP thinking I would just try and remind myself to prepare for this interview and I got so stirred up. Bill Woodson who was the narrator with THAT BIG BOOMING MARCH OF TIME VOICE. I got so excited and I can see how a child would have really gotten into it.

ANIMERICA: You talk about the experience as though it was very hands-on and everyone was working closely together. Was that the case?

WALDO: Alan and Jameson pretty much had control over it. (Distributor, producer, and property owner) Sandy Frank of course was on the phone with Alan all the time making suggestions. He never came to any dubbing sessions though, but I know that Alan was always saying "I have to talk to Sandy, I have to talk to Sandy." And he'd call Alan from all over the world wherever he happened to be and he'd give his input. But Alan and Jameson pretty much ran the ship. But we all came to recording sessions together at a little place called Valentine's Studio which was just a small little place in the valley. Usually we were given a call at something like 10 in the morning and we'd finish usually three or four hours later. We all loved



FRED FLINTSTONE'S MOTHER-IN-LAW

JANET WALDO

INTERVIEW CONTINUED FROM PAGE 35

each other—it was a great cast.

ANIMERICA: Were individuals coming in and doing their parts separately (which is common today)? If there was a scene where G-Force was in the *Phoenix* talking together, then the actors were in the studio following suit?

WALDO: I hate working on tape separately away from everyone. With *The Jetsons*, we all worked together at once and that makes a big difference in the finished product. The one thing about working with Japanese animation, because it's all done to time, according to stopwatch rather than looping it to mouth movements, was that we would do it scene by scene a little bit at a time. I don't know if I've made this clear, but during *Battle of the Planets* we never saw the film at all during the recording sessions. We had to do it all according to time. If Princess had a line where she would say "Please, no!" I couldn't just say it like that. Depending on the clock, maybe I'd have to say it in a shorter amount of time or to draw it out as need be. "Ohhhhhh, Please noooooooooo!" And of course we weren't looping to mouth movements because it was a different language. Alan Dinehart took care of this and they had a stopwatch on us and that was one of the hardest things to do. Because you couldn't really play the emotion in your own time. But if we were all in a scene then we'd work on it together. And if you weren't in that particular bit then you'd go outside, or chat, or make phone calls, or do whatever you wanted to do.

ANIMERICA: So Casey Kasem (who played Mark) is standing there next to you...

WALDO: Oh, Casey Kasem...I have to tell you, Casey was making phone calls all the time!

ANIMERICA: Well you figure a guy like that has got to be on top of things.

WALDO: Whenever it was his turn to be in the studio, you'd always hear someone yelling "Casey? Where's Casey? Get Casey!" He was always on the phone. Casey taught me a few lessons because he's such a good businessman and of course I'm not. He was talking about his tapes, his demonstration tapes to show off his talents, and he said, "What about your tape?" and I said, "oh, I don't have a tape!" He said, "You have got to be kidding!" and of course I immediately went out and made one.

ANIMERICA: So he was acting as the leader of G-Force even when he wasn't in character?

WALDO: Oh yes. Casey was always into fad diets and he had all these great ideas for health food and I remember he wouldn't chew gum that had sugar in it. He was still a little worried about the stuff that didn't have sugar in it because he wasn't sure what it *did* have in it! So Casey is a very detail-oriented person. I remember we had this cast party at my house after the show had finally wrapped, remember we did 85 of them, and we felt very much wedded to each other and like a family. Casey came with this huge case of wine. He was a well-organized guy, a very sweet guy, and a very business-like person. He didn't fool around. Except on the phone.

ANIMERICA: So it sounds like it was a big happy family, but were there any conflicts? Was there, say, a battle during *Battle of the Planets*?

WALDO: Actually I can't sense that there was any tension at all. There was great hilarity and great joy. Alan, a man with a huge sense of humor, always had some jokes to tell. So we had a great rapport and I can't recall there being any problems. People made the sessions on time. Keye Luke (Zoltar) was a charming man. Ronnie Schell (Jason) loved to run and I think he had broken his kneecap at one point, so he was on crutches for part of the time. Of course, Alan Young (7-Zark-7 and Keyop) and I still work with to this day. He and I do a series right now where he plays my husband and he's a good friend. I can't think of any dissension. We just had fun.

ANIMERICA: Let's talk about your character. What were your impressions of Princess? Did you come up with any background for her?

WALDO: I did. I was coming fresh from *The Jetsons* and I was in ingenue mode. Alan was a wonderful director and didn't allow you to go off without getting the right characterization first. Princess was very knowledgeable, very much in control, and not too sweet or too naïve. She was a very sharp lady and I tried to think of that when I was playing her. Of course I loved to play the villains. I love doing far-out characters and I got to do lots of them, mostly very strong women. But



Princess was actually quite complicated. She analyzed things and thought them through very carefully before making a statement. She didn't just do things impetuously. She was very thoughtful and very controlled. You may not have realized it, but that's what I was thinking when I played her.

ANIMERICA: I'm also a little curious about your memories of another sci-fi animated production you worked on in the seventies called *Fantastic Planet*.

WALDO: I loved *Fantastic Planet*! I'm sure you are aware that it won a lot of awards. I'm so glad you remembered that. We looped to mouth movements on that one. To tell the truth, I thought there were things that were much more wonderful in the original French version than what we changed it to in the rewrite. Naturally, being an opinionated person, I wasn't crazy about the woman who played the ingenue in the film. I remember I played a grandmother character in the film, who was someone very strange because, I think she didn't have any clothes on!

ANIMERICA: That's a long way from Judy Jetson.

WALDO: She was not a pretty lady! She should have refused to be photographed! I loved that film because it had such substance.

ANIMERICA: As someone who had strong opinions about the adaptation of *Fantastic Planet*, how do you think *BOTP* measured up to the original Japanese version?

WALDO: I really only saw one Japanese episode all the way through, and it turned out to be my favorite episode that I worked on. It was the one where Princess is an imposter, a robot. Well, at least we played her as a robot. She disintegrates in the end. What I loved about it was that she was a robot, but she fell in love with Jason. She wasn't supposed to have a lot of feelings but she had a lot of love for Jason. And then at the end for her to disintegrate was very shattering for me. I remember seeing some of it with a Japanese woman playing the part and being totally blown away by her performance. She was shrieking and really wild and far out. I loved that. So while we never saw a lot of the original, they would show us a little bit here and there. I think it was mostly to show us who we were playing. They were using the Japanese version as a guide.

ANIMERICA: There's so many credits on your resume. I just have to throw some names out and see what you remember about them. How about *Thundarr the Barbarian*?

WALDO: That was a series that I also did for Alan Dinehart, and I think that's why he hired me. I got that job directly because of *BOTP*. He liked the fact that I was versatile and that I could do lots of different voices. I think on *Thundarr* I wound up doing a lot of villains and other far-out things that I dearly love to do. Dear Alan, he was wonderful for me because he gave me lots of work!

ANIMERICA: *King of the Hill*. How did you get involved with that?

WALDO: It's like Laurence Olivier said, "you never stop auditioning." I have to audition all the time, in fact even when they made new episodes of *The Jetsons* after years and years of being off the air, I had to re-audition for my old part! I had auditioned for *King of the Hill* and won a part, then they called me back in later on and I had to audition for other things. The first part that I played was very different than what I've normally done, so it was thrilling to win the role.

ANIMERICA: So what have you been doing recently?

WALDO: Well, I've certainly managed to keep busy. Unfortunately, right now I don't have a series, which is the first time I can recall being without, so that's not so great. But I do a lot of freelance things and I do promos for the Cartoon Network. I do CD-ROMs and interestingly enough I'm still doing a lot of the same characters that I started out with. I did one not too long ago for Penelope Pitstop. Also, I've been doing a lot of radio and I worked with Richard Crenna a couple of times. I did a radio series with Alan Young. And I'll do whatever I'm called for. ☆

